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PIONEER

**Celebrating
the 150th
Anniversary
of the
First Overland
Telegraph**

*Published by the Sons
of Utah Pioneers*



PIONEER

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MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the National Society of the Sons of Utah Pioneers is to preserve the memory and heritage of the early pioneers of the Utah Territory. We honor the pioneers for their faith in God, devotion to family, loyalty to church and country, hard work and service to others, courage in adversity, personal integrity, and unyielding determination. The society also honors present-day pioneers worldwide in many walks of life who exemplify these same qualities of character. It is further intended to teach these same qualities to the youth, who will be tomorrow's pioneers.

**Published by the
Sons of Utah
Pioneers**

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today, and tomorrow.*

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President's Message

BY L. LAMAR ADAMS



As a senior in Washington's Walla Walla High School I had a part-time

job delivering telegrams on my bicycle after school. I prided myself on how fast I could get the telegram delivered and get back to the office to wait for the next—until one day I tried too hard and scared a driver at an intersection, his seeing me just miss the back end of his car as I slowed down for him to pass in my hurry to get across the intersection. But he also slowed down—so instead, his back bumper caught my front tire and jerked my bike out from under me sending me prancing lightly on into the otherwise deserted intersection. No one was hurt, not even the bicycle,

but the older gentlemen could not let it go at that, apologies and all, and could not understand my determination to get on my way. He had to later call the telegraph office to make sure all was right, or to make right all things, one of the two. That was my last day as a telegram delivery boy and chances are I would

have completely forgotten that I once held the distinct and unique title of "Telegram Delivery Boy," except for the little accident.

The telegraph was a necessary step in pioneering civilization to a new height. Brigham Young stated, "Every discovery in science and art, that is really true and useful to mankind has been given by direct revelation from God, though but few acknowledge it. It has been given with a view to prepare the way for the ultimate triumph of truth." But why look back upon such "ancient" means? We are to remember, even come to know, our pioneers and forefathers of all ages. Brigham added, "We should take advantage of all these great discoveries, the accumulated wisdom of ages, and give to our children the benefit of every branch of useful knowledge, to prepare them to step forward and efficiently do their part in the great work" (*Journal of Discourses* 9:369).

What marvelous means we now have in being able to communicate in vital ways with miraculous accomplishment throughout the world preparatory to the final curtain call.

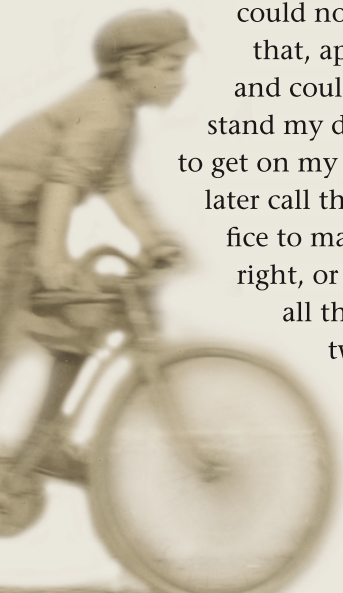
We look back upon the overland messengers, then the Pony Express, replaced by the telegraph, on and on, until we see how far we have come in being able to receive greater communication. As Kent Lott,

our magazine director, observed, if the people would have been prepared for the telegraph in Brigham Young's day, the Mountain Meadows Massacre might have been prevented.

How grateful we are to our forefathers for providing the telegraph to hasten the day of the computer, cell phones, ipods, blackberries—and the best is yet to come. It is 10 times easier for us to write our histories and the histories of our forefathers.

Recently I mentioned that when I heard about memorializing our pioneer ancestors I asked myself, "Why, what good does it do?" After writing 36 histories for 36 pioneer ancestors and their families, I was beginning to have with these ancestors spiritual experiences above and beyond that gained from their temple work. It was in the fulfilling of this further commandment to come to know them, by studying them, their histories, their sacrifices, their progress along with their suffering and afflictions that drew me to them and brought spiritual experiences with them not otherwise obtained.

The ultimate in our progress of communication is living by revelation, and the telegraph sends a message in that direction to encourage us along the way. It stands as a monument of the past to point us to the future with great expectations. ▣



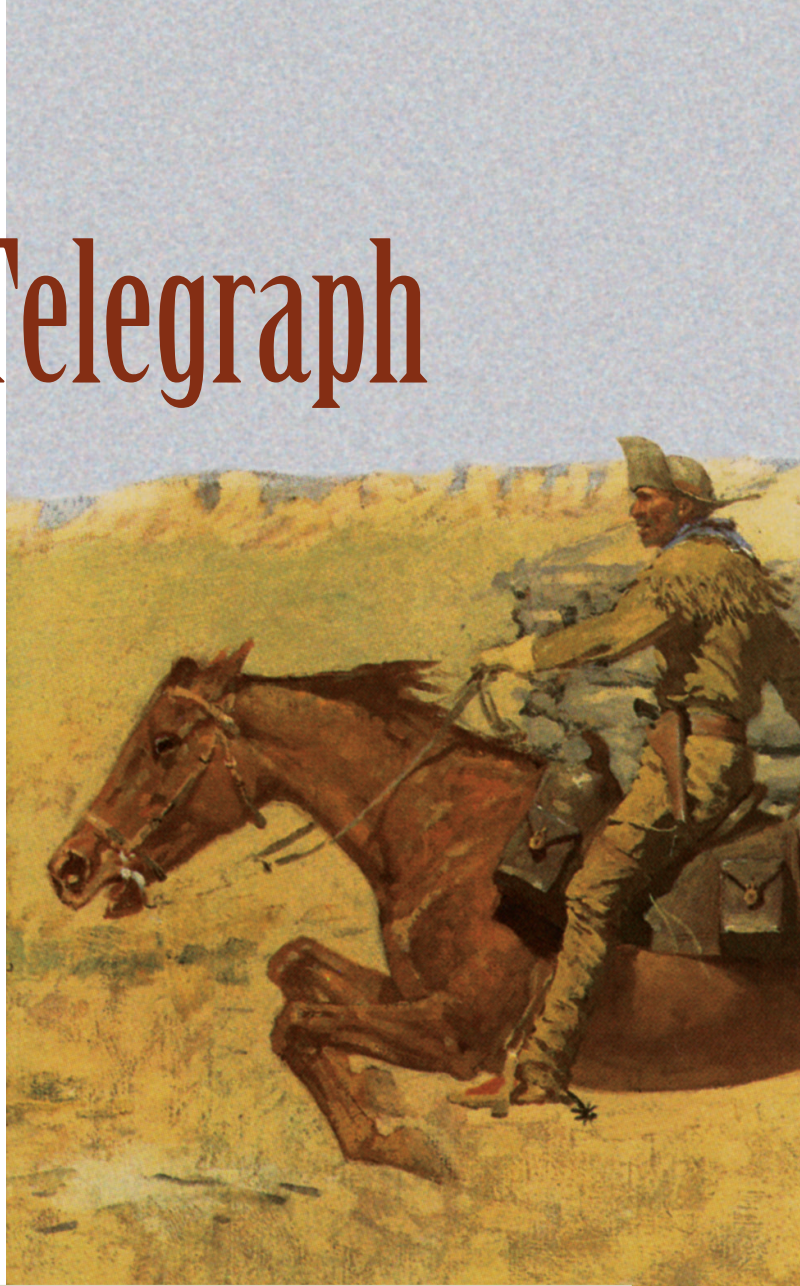
² THE First Overland Telegraph

BY GEORGE HYDE

In the spring of 1860, the country was startled by an advertisement in the *New York Tribune*, announcing the opening of the Pony Express line, which proposed to bear telegrams from St. Joe, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, in eight days, and letters from St. Joe to San Francisco in ten days.

The day set for the start was April 3. Many persons doubted that the riders would ever get through, but they did, crossing the Sierra Nevadas through thirty feet of snow and delivering their little packets at St. Joe and Sacramento on time.

For weeks thereafter, the newspapers of the country were filled with the wonders of the Pony Express—the hardy little ponies, their speed and endurance, the plucky pony boys, the pick of the daring spirits of the whole frontier, their escapes from roving bands of Indians, their courage in bearing extremes of cold and heat, thirst, and fatigue.



Weber Station, Echo Canyon



"The second day we arrived at the mouth of Echo Canyon on the Weber River where I was left to stay at

the Pony Express Station, there with the others to await the coming of the first Express which was expected from the west."

—Thomas Owen King Jr., pony express rider. See *Pioneer* magazine 2010, Vol. 57, No. 2, 25.





Above: Going of the Pony Express, by Frederic Remington; see the National Park Service Pony Express National Historic Trail brochure. Left: Thomas Owen King photos courtesy Dorothy Brewerton.

They told of James Moore, who having completed his ride from Midway Station west to Julesburg, Colorado, one hundred and forty miles, found at Julesburg a packet containing government despatches waiting to go east, and no one to carry them.

In seven minutes Moore, without waiting for breakfast, started back to Midway, which he reached in fourteen hours forty-six minutes from the time he had left there, having covered a distance of two hundred and eighty miles without rest or food. . . .

News from the East

One midnight in November, 1860, a coach was rolling eastward through the great Platte Valley when the beat of fast approaching hoofs was heard on the road, and the passengers thrust their heads out of the windows to see the Pony Express rider go by.

"What's the news?" called the stage-driver.

"Lincoln elected," came back the answer. "New York gives him fifty thousand majority."

In April the pony boys bore the news of the firing on Fort Sumter to California, and in July they carried the tidings from the battlefield of Bull Run. Those were exciting times, and the swift pony service proved an inestimable boon to the news-hungry population on the Pacific Coast.

The enterprise proved unprofitable, however, just as Russell's partners had foreseen. The company had an abundance of patronage, and yet, even by charging five dollars for carrying each packet weighing one-half ounce or less, the firm could not make their earnings equal their running expenses.

In another way, however, the line paid, for it prayed that the Utah route over the mountains could be kept open the year round, and the result was that, in the spring of 1861, the company received a contract for carrying the California mails in its coaches from St. Joe to San Francisco.

During the summer the company sold its interest in the Pony Express, for it was by that time clear that the line could not live much longer. Edward Creighton was then at work on the Overland Telegraph line, the completion of which would sound the doom of the Pony Express.

Creighton's parents were poor Irish emigrants. He was born in Ohio, in 1820, and spent his boyhood on a farm. At twenty-one he was given a team and wagon by his father and set to work as a wagoner on the old Pike, hauling freight, but he did not stick to such work long.

He took a small contract for building part of a stage road, then he got larger contracts, and, about 1847, he contracted to build a short telegraph line in Ohio. At that time the telegraph was new and was looked upon by many as a mere scientific toy, but young Creighton saw that telegraphy



Edward Creighton

had a future, and he went into it to stay.

It might be said that he actually built his way from Ohio westward to the Missouri, taking one contract after another. Finally, in 1860, he completed a line to Omaha, but still his eyes were turned to the West. He

wished to build an Overland Telegraph line and connect the Atlantic with the Pacific.



To Link the East and West

In the winter of 1859–1860, Creighton went East and met J. H. Wade, at that time a heavy stockholder in the Western Union. Creighton broached his Overland Telegraph scheme, but Wade laughed at him. Build a line one thousand five hundred miles long through a wild Indian country?

The idea seemed ridiculous, yet Creighton persisted in arguing that it could be done and . . . made to pay big money, and in the end Wade consented to a preliminary survey of the route.



In 1872 artist John Gast painted a popular scene of people moving west called the *Spirit of the Frontier or American Progress*. The scene portrays settlers moving west, guided and protected by a goddess-like woman with long blond hair, dressed in a flowing white gown. She is the figure of "Progress," and on her forehead is a gold star, the "Star of Empire." In her right arm she holds a book, and telegraph wire is looped around her elbow. In her left hand she is trailing the telegraph wire westward. On the ground below her, three trains, a stagecoach, a covered wagon, farmers with cattle, men on horseback, and a pony express rider travel westward. In the left side of the painting, Indians and buffalo are retreating westward from Progress, leaving behind buffalo skeletons.

It is interesting to note that the angel is bringing the "light" as seen on the eastern side of the painting as she travels towards the "darkened" west.

See *American Progress*, by artist John Gast at the Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian American Art Museum, <http://siris-artinventories.si.edu>.

Creighton left Omaha by stage in the fall of 1860 and started West, looking over the line of the proposed telegraph. At Salt Lake he had several talks with Brigham Young, without whose consent it would have been impossible to construct a line through Utah. Brigham was heartily pleased with the scheme, and being thus assured of Mormon aid, Creighton continued his journey westward.

He crossed the mountains on horseback in the dead of winter, suffering intensely from the cold, and finished his survey as far as Sacramento. At this point he found the eastern end of the wire owned by the California State Telegraph Company, and here he received a message from Wade, who was in San Francisco, having gone around by sea.

Creighton joined Wade, and together they held several conferences with the officials of the California Telegraph Company. An agreement was finally reached, by the terms of which the California Company was to extend its wire eastward, while Creighton at the same time was to build a line from Omaha westward. When the two wires were joined a new company was to be formed, under the name of the Pacific Telegraph Company.

Racing to Salt Lake City

Creighton now returned East and at once set to work. He sent gangs into the cedar canyons south of the Platte and into the Black Hills of Wyoming, and as fast as poles could be cut, they were hauled and distributed along the line. Meantime, casks of insulators and huge rolls of copper wire were shipped up the Missouri on packet-boats and sent on westward from Omaha in ox trains.

The race now began, to see whether the California Company or the Eastern Company would reach Salt Lake first. The California people had four hundred and fifty miles to construct, the Eastern Company had one thousand one hundred.

The eastern portion of the line was built in two sections, H. M. Porter working from Omaha to Julesburg, Edward Creighton from Julesburg to Salt Lake. From Omaha they ran the line southwest to Fort Kearny, where they struck the Overland Stage line. By following this line they were able to utilize the Stage Company's buildings for telegraph offices and save the trouble and expense of putting up buildings of their own.

The work was pushed vigorously, and on October 17, 1861, Creighton brought his wire into Salt Lake. The California line was finished a week later.

Stock Earns Fortunes

When the line was projected, Mr. Wade induced Congress to pass a subsidy of forty thousand dollars, to be paid each year for ten years to the company that should construct a telegraph line across the continent. As soon as the work was commenced, the company issued stock, but few men believed the line would prove a success, and the stock sold at first at eighteen dollars a share.

Creighton bought \$100,000 worth of this stock at this figure, paying \$18,000. As soon as the line was opened, the company "watered." Each stockholder was presented with two extra shares for every share he had purchased. Creighton thus held \$300,000 of the stock. When the line was opened and the first messages successfully transmitted, the line sprang at once into public favor.

The newspapers lauded the builders and were as wildly enthusiastic over the telegraph as the now forgotten Pony Express. The result of all this comment was that the company's stock rose at once from eighteen to eighty-five.

Creighton now sold out \$100,000 worth of his stock for \$85,000 in cash, still retaining \$200,000

worth of stock. In less than six months the \$18,000 he had put into the enterprise had grown to over a quarter of a million dollars. The other men who had helped to put the project through were much larger gainers by its success.

When the telegraph was being built, it was recognized that the Indians must be prevented from interfering with the wire. The line ran for nearly one thousand five hundred miles through Indian country where there was not one white man to a hundred square miles, and it was clear to everyone that if the Indians took it into their heads to meddle with the wire, they could cause a great deal of trouble. In order to prevent this, Mr. Creighton conceived the idea of making the red men believe that the wire was "medicine," or possessed of magic properties.

Showing the Indians How It Worked

A large camp of Indians had gathered near Scott's Bluffs on the Platte, in the summer of 1861, to watch the building of the line. The telegraph builders held a council with these people and gave them an awe-inspiring account of the powers of the wire, but the Indians did not believe what was told them.

A demonstration was decided on, and two chiefs were stationed on the line several miles



apart, each one with a telegraph operator and an interpreter at his disposal. Each chief then gave the operator a message for the other, which was immediately put on the wire. As soon as the respective messages had been delivered, the two Indians mounted their swiftest ponies and galloped along the line until they met.

One chief then asked the other to repeat the message he sent and was surprised to hear it word for word. The second chief then asked for his message, and it also was repeated exactly as he had spoken it. The two then turned their eyes with great respect toward the slender wire that stretched above their heads from pole to pole.

"Um-m!" grunted the first chief. "Medicine-wire no good!" The two called their people together and went off to their hunting-grounds.

"Medicine-Wire" Loses Its Fears

For two years the Indians did not trouble the line, but gradually they learned from half-breeds and squaw-men that if they wished to injure the white men, they could do so very easily by simply breaking the wire that stretched across their country from east to west. Therefore, when the tribes went to war in 1864, the Telegraph Company at once found itself in serious trouble.

A raiding party would ride up to the telegraph line, each warrior would throw one end of his

rawhide lasso over the wire, and then turn and gallop away, jerking the wire from the poles. Next, small fires would be kindled at the base of the poles, and the Indians would sit down in a circle and calmly smoke and chat until the poles were burned through and fell. Each man would cut off a long piece of wire with his tomahawk, roll it up, mount, and ride away.

Their old fear of the medicine-wire had vanished: they had learned that it was quite harmless and that it could be made into pretty ornaments for the women. Telegraph-wire jewelry was becoming fashion on the plains.

Sometimes the more enterprising savages would break the wire and then ride in among the bluffs and hide. Before long the telegraph repair-gang would come along the road, looking for the break.

When they had found it they would unharness their teams, send the animals out to graze, and set to work repairing the line.

Then, all at once the Indians would make a swoop, run off the teams, cut off and kill one or two of the linemen, and chase the others back among the wagons, where they would besiege them until nightfall, or until a patrol of cavalry happened along.

During these years, Edward Creighton was superintendent of the line from Omaha as far





west as Salt Lake, and the Indians had his work cut out for him. Hardly a day passed without their breaking the one-thousand-mile line at some point along its length.

In January, 1865, the Indians swept the road near the forks of the Platte, leaving a trail of burning stations and blazing telegraph-poles behind them. When the troops ventured out upon the road a few days later, they found the telegraph station at Julesburg burned and forty-five miles of telegraph line utterly destroyed.

The country looked as if it had been swept by a fiery tornado. The telegraph poles had vanished completely. Part of the wire had been cut up with tomahawks and carried away, while the rest lay on the ground, so twisted and tangled as to be worthless. A few days later the Indians struck the line on

the North Platte and destroyed many miles of it. At this time the government had drawn off most of its troops to the battlefields of the South, and on the Overland line there was not one soldier to the mile.

Rebuilding the Line

The life of a telegraph lineman on the Overland was one of extreme danger. Creighton had his men organized into gangs, each gang with its own wagon train and little escort of cavalry. There were wire wagons loaded with rolls of copper wire, and pole wagons loaded with poles.

On long stretches of the line not a stick of timber was obtainable, and poles often had to be hauled one hundred and fifty miles. Superintendent Creighton had charge of one of the repair outfits himself, and besides his own





gang of armed men he had thirty cavalymen as an escort.

The men soon learned by sad experience to take no unnecessary risks. During the day the wagons were kept corraled, and the telegraph men within their little stronghold were safe from attack unless a very strong force of warriors should come across them. After nightfall the Indians usually returned to their camps, and the telegraph gangs were free to work.

The men would leave the corral, taking one or two wagons, the horses' hoofs muffled in blankets. All conversation was carried on in whispers, and the work was done as silently as possible.

The repair-work was often very roughly done. Sometimes old poles that had been burned off close to the ground were used, as most of their length remained sound and uninjured.

One gang of men dug holes, while another drove spikes into the poles to hang the wire on.

At times no poles at all were to be had, and a thin wire covered with green silk was strung along near the ground, resting on the sage-brush and weeds.

This delicate thread of wire was often broken by bears, coyotes, and even a passing jack-rabbit might part the line and cut off the people of California from all news for an entire day.

Occasionally the Indians camped for the night squarely across the line, and at such times the

men did not dare leave their corral of wagons. Superintendent Creighton would attach an instrument to his end of the broken wire, get important government messages from the East, detach the instrument, make his way cautiously around the Indian encampment, put the instrument on the other end of the break, and send the messages on to California.

It was not until late in 1865 that troops could be spared for the plains in sufficient numbers to keep the Indians in hand. As soon as the new regiments arrived, they set to work in clearing the Overland Stage and Telegraph lines, and the main bodies of raiders were soon driven to their hunting-grounds north and south of the line. Small raids continued to be made, and the Telegraph line did not become secure until the Union Pacific Railroad was built and the Indians were forced to stay on their reservations. ▣

George E. Hyde was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1882. He received formal education in the public schools only to the eighth grade. At eighteen, Hyde became deaf. He was plagued by blindness most of the latter years of his life and spent his final years working with the aid of a high-powered magnifying glass. Despite these handicaps, Hyde became known as the "dean of American Indian historians."

"The First Overland Telegraph" by George Hyde first appeared in the Railroad Magazine, June 1911.

“The Dearest Laborers”

Pilgrims on the Lightning Road to Zion

BY DAVID LYLE WOOD

In 1857–58 during the Utah War, [Henry O’Rielly, an avid telegraph builder], and others talked about building a telegraph line for use by the U.S. Army in its efforts to subdue the Mormons, who, according to O’Rielly, were “resolved on maintaining their rocky fastness.”¹

But the Mormons too wanted an electrical link with the outside world. In January 1853, the Utah Territorial Legislature appealed to the United States Congress for a telegraph connection. “No movement of Congress,” read the petition, “could be better calculated to preserve inviolable our glorious Union than to bind the East and West by an Electric stream whereby intelligence and instantaneous intercourse from the eastern to the western limits of our widespread country will annihilate the distance and make free men of Maine and Oregon, Florida and California immediate neighbors.”²

Work on a telegraph wire running up the Missouri River from St. Louis to Kansas City, Missouri, had begun in 1850, . . . and on June 16, [1860], Congress passed an act “to facilitate communication between the Atlantic and the Pacific States by electric telegraph.”³

In the spring of 1861, Jacob Gates, agent in charge of Mormon overland travel, sent David Henry Cannon eastward to meet the year’s first group of English immigrants. Cannon led them from New York to Florence, Nebraska, via St. Joseph, Missouri, and Nebraska City. “Upon reaching Nebraska City,” wrote Cannon, “J. J. Creighton came on board the steamer and wanted to hire



men to set telegraph poles from the Missouri River to Salt Lake City. . . . Cannon did arrange for a meeting between Creighton and Gates. . . .

Edward Creighton . . . “Ed,” as his workers “respectfully called him . . . and which he liked,” could be a “jolly” fellow at times, but more importantly, he was “a resolute, enterprising man,” who had “a great head” with “a great deal in it” and who “knew how to use it.” He was “a steam engine of energy and [had] wonderful powers of endurance.”⁴ . . .

A letter from an anonymous Mormon missionary, published in a November issue of the *Deseret News*, announced: “The agent of the Pacific Telegraph Company” (a subsidiary of Western Union) was “on his way to Utah and intermediate points for the purpose of making arrangements for putting up the poles and extending the line . . . and to ascertain at what point the line from California would meet that from the East—the whole to be completed next season.”⁵ Creighton arrived in Salt Lake City on Dec. 14. On the 20th he met with Brigham Young and, according to George A. Smith: “it is understood that he wants to get telegraph poles put up through this desert country for a distance of 500 miles.”⁶

Local Mormon contractors would supply these timbers. John W. Young, one of Brigham’s sons, would be one of these. Likewise, Hamilton Gray Park, Brigham Young’s business manager, would be involved. The poles would come from Echo and Weber canyons.⁷ . . .

It is no wonder that Superintendent Creighton looked to Mormon immigrants for help. The newcomers were going to Utah anyway, and, perhaps more importantly, the looming Civil War created a labor shortage in the United States. . . . Furthermore, many Mormon newcomers were destitute of means and jumped at the chance to work their way west, while at the same time earning enough to fund their families’ continued pilgrimages to Zion.

On May 25, David H. Cannon and his party of Mormon immigrants arrived at Florence, Nebraska. The next day, Jacob Gates went to Omaha, and it was probably then that he and Cannon met with Creighton. According to Cannon, he and Gates “went down and met [J. J. Creighton] at Omaha at the appointed time and arranged to furnish him 75 men. We arranged what the salaries of the

men would be and that they [the men] were to be delivered in Salt Lake City not later than the 15th day of November. Half of the money that was to be paid these men was advanced to them to apply for the emigration of their families.”⁸

Charles H. Brown, the secretary, said that the Mormon immigrants, who were hired at low wages, “were the dearest laborers we had. They were from the cities and factory towns of England and had, with one or two exceptions, no adaptability to the work they were to do. They could not learn to be handy drivers of oxen, nor to do well and with ease the kind of work for which they were employed.”⁹ Before the summer was over, Brown would modify his assessment.

No complete roster of the Creighton brother’s Mormon employees has yet been discovered, but a few of their names are known. In his autobiographical sketch, Charles Lock Rogers, a 19-year-old Mormon convert from St. Pancras, London, . . . England, who had just crossed the Atlantic aboard the ship *Underwriter*, wrote: “By the spring of 1861 I had, by close living, saved enough to bring myself and wife, [J. Gane] Moss, as far as Florence. I sent my wife on to S. L. Valley by Captain Jonsons train [Sixtus E. Johnson Company], I joined the telegraph company that was being built that year. . . . We arrived in S. L. City in good health.”

Eighteen-year-old Isaac Barton, a pattern maker from St. Helens, . . . England, who also had emigrated on the *Underwriter*, reportedly drove an



ox-drawn wagon, loaded with telegraph wire. Edwin Parker, an 18-year-old servant from Preston, . . . England, was employed digging holes for telegraph poles until he reached Fort Bridger; then he strung wire. Twenty-one-year-old James Ward and his wife, Harriet Brown Ward, left Wiltshire, England, in March of 1860. Upon arriving in Omaha, James went to work for Creighton stringing telegraph wires westward; in the meantime Harriet journeyed to Utah with a team and wagon in an unidentified pioneer company. Seventeen-year-old John England, a laborer from Bradpole, . . .

England, also worked on the telegraph and, with the money he earned, helped his parents and five siblings immigrate to Zion.

Some of the other Mormon telegraph workers had immigrated earlier. John Hymas, from Rayleigh, . . . England, had sailed to America aboard the ship *Caravan* in 1856. Lacking money to continue westward he had worked at various jobs—in a New York City market, on a farm in “Newbury,” New York, and for the railroad in Iowa, where in Council Bluffs he met and courted Mary Ann Pitman. The 21-year-old John, like other Mormon

Wiring a Continent: The Making of the U.S. Transcontinental Telegraph Line

by James Gamble

James Gamble was responsible for building the western section of the U.S. transcontinental telegraph line that connected San Francisco with Salt Lake City, Utah. The eastern section was built simultaneously from Omaha, Nebraska, to Salt Lake City by Edward Creighton.

In 1881 Gamble documented his experiences in two articles for *The Californian* magazine: “Early Reminiscences of the Telegraph on the Pacific Coast,” and “Wiring a Continent: The Making of the U.S. Transcontinental Telegraph Line.”

In the latter he writes: “Among the different working parties were several Indians. They were employed principally in taking care of the stock, herding them at night where grass was to be found and driving them in at early morning. Another object in employing them was that they might report to the different tribes how well they were treated and in this way favorably influence the Indians toward the members of the party and

the telegraph line. . . . They were generally paid in provisions and clothing and always seemed perfectly satisfied. . . .

“While our men were engaged stretching the wires up to a stage station, about two hundred miles east of the Sierra Nevada, a thunderstorm broke over the valley at some distance from where they were working. The electric charges from the clouds were so heavy that the men were obliged to use buckskin gloves to avoid the shocks. Some strange Indians coming up just at that time, one of the men motioned to them to come and help him pull at the wire. One more willing than the rest took hold of it; and while drawing the wire along, the ground being moist, and the Indian in his bare feet, he received an electric charge that doubled him up in a knot. A more astonished Indian was probably never seen. He sprung to his feet and started on a full run. His companions, not knowing what had occurred, looked on with perfect astonishment. The electrified Indian stopped after running a short distance and called to his comrades to join him, to whom,



I presume, he explained the effect, without exactly knowing the cause. He and the others spread the news of this occurrence, and after that no Indian could be induced to go near the wire or touch the poles. Governor Nye, of Nevada, who also acted as Indian Agent, informed me, shortly after the completion of the

immigrant men, got a job driving an ox team hauling wire and supplies for Edward Creighton. Meanwhile, Mary Ann Pitman journeyed to Salt Lake City in the 1861 Homer Duncan Company. Also in 1860, the 22-year-old laborer John Vincent had come from Caterham, . . . England. While he was engaged in telegraph construction, his new bride, the English-born Phoebe Perry Vincent, traveled west. . . .

Available information about the Mormon telegraph workers indicates that they were recent immigrants to the United States; they had come from

diverse parts of England; they were young men, ranging in age from 18 to 22; some were married, others were single; most of them were unskilled. All were pilgrims—religious devotees en route to the center place of their faith; they became “pilgrim-laborers.”

Not all of the 1861 Mormon telegraph-workers were inexperienced immigrants. At least one of them was from Utah. George Sudbury Humphreys had left Utah in 1859 and had worked his way east, first as a teamster, then as a ranch hand, making his way to Omaha, where he worked as a pin-

setter in a bowling alley, a bartender, and harvesting ice. In early March 1861 he drove a four-horse-team freight wagon from Omaha to Denver and back; then, James Creighton hired him to drive a wagon to Salt Lake City.¹⁰

A few Mormon immigrants who applied for telegraph work were turned away. Frederick W. Blake, an English clerk who had arrived in the United States in 1860 aboard the ship *Underwriter*, wrote: “I tried to get hired to go to Utah by the aid of the Telegraph Company under the management of Mr. Creighton, and I went to Omaha with 5 of the Boys, but received no encouragement from him although he took down our names, he wanted experienced Teamsters & of course we would not . . . pass as such, as it would have resulted unfavorably to us when we made the start. . . . The man Creighton had sought for 12 men & had applied to Milo

overland line, that on his meeting with the Indians in Ruby Valley he noticed that whenever they had occasion to pass under the wire they got as nearly equidistant between the poles as possible and appeared anxious to keep as far away from the line as they could. . . .

“Sweetwater Station, in the South Pass, was attacked by a band of Sioux Indians. The operator and stage men entrenched themselves as well as they could in their dug-out, a mud hut hollowed out in the earth, part above and part below ground. . . . At the first moment of attack the operator telegraphed to the nearest fort for troops to come to the rescue. Shortly after having done so, the wires were cut by the Indians in the hope that it would cut off communication for relief. They were knowing enough to do that. The wire being cut prevented the besieged operator and his comrades from communicating with their friends at the adjoining stations, and it was not until after the troops arrived and had dispersed the Indians that news could be had telling of their successful resistance. At

another time five hundred Arrapahoes and Cheyennes attacked Fort Sedgwick, where some 30 troops and 12 civilians were established. The whites held out bravely, but lost 17 of their number before assistance reached them.

“In this attack, some of the Indians succeeded in reaching a shed, where, with sundry provisions, some carboys of nitric acid were stored for use in the battery. The acid had a smelt to them something like good strong whisky. They carried off one of the carboys, to have, as they expected, a good time. Their good time did not last long. An Indian's ‘nip’ is not a pony glass. Those of them who nipped from that carboy did so for the last time. Their exit from this world was about as sudden as it would have been had a bullet gone through their brains. The effect produced on the remainder of them at the sight of their dead ‘lightning struck’ comrades was for a moment favorable to the besieged. They ceased their attack, seemingly lost in wonder and admiration in the thought that white men could drink such powerful whisky and live.”

Andrus for them. Milo advised me to get the names of men. I included my own, but as no definite arrangement was made, the affair broke [through] & most of the men were deprived of the chance of going."¹¹ Blake was more fortunate than the rest; he got a job driving a wagon for the 1861 Church Train led by Ira Eldridge.

Each member of Edward Creighton's telegraph construction crew had a specific assignment—the surveyors marked the route, ax men located timber and cut poles or trimmed away tree branches that might interfere with the telegraph line; and there were teamsters whose wagons carried heavy reels of galvanized steel wire, coils of solder, insulators, batteries, battery chemicals in sturdy wicker-covered glass bottles, tools, kegs of nails, camp equipment, and provisions. Other men drove wagons loaded with poles, dropping them one by one at approximately 70-yard intervals (22 to 25 poles per mile). The diggers worked with pick-axes, crowbars and shovels to dig holes one foot across and five-feet deep. Others worked as pole setters, or wire stringers—men who climbed the poles, installed insulators, and hung the wire. A few of the men were herdsmen, managing the livestock. Others were hunters. Several individuals assumed more than one of these roles at various times.

If there were, in fact, 75 Latter-day Saint men in Edward Creighton's telegraph-building crew, they constituted about 19 percent of the total work force of some four hundred men. Each worker was armed with a navy revolver and a rifle. Creighton used hundreds of mules and oxen and approximately one hundred wagons to move the men and equipment.

The telegraph workers traveled and labored under various wagonmasters: James Creighton (36 wagons); Joseph Creighton (10 wagons); Aaron Hoel (20 wagons); Matthew J. Ragan (5 wagons); George Guy (3 wagons); John and David Hazard (15 wagons); James Dimmock (5 wagons); and Robert Tate (3 wagons).

The Mormon recruits accompanied and worked under the Hazard brothers. Ed Creighton's secretary, Charles H. Brown, personally supervised the loading of the Hazards's wagons and recorded what happened. When it came time to yoke up the oxen, says Brown, one of the Mormons

evoked peals of laughter from the more experienced hands when he "tried to slip the bow, not taken from the yoke, over [the] head and horns" of the off ox.¹²

Not all of the telegraph workers started west at once. Matthew Ragan's train left first—early in May. . . . A second telegraph crew, led by James Creighton, left Omaha about May 10; the Hazard brothers' train, including the Mormon pilgrim-laborers, was the third contingent to embark.

These, and the other telegraph parties, followed a well-known, well-beaten path. From Omaha to the Elk Horn River they crossed rolling timberless prairie (except for trees that grew along the banks of streams). Charles Brown commented on the number of squatter cabins along the way. Later, Brown described the Platte River Valley as "broad and beautiful." . . . After crossing to the south bank of the Platte, they reached Fort Kearny. Here the garrison consisted of one company of dragoons; all other soldiers "had been ordered to Fort Leavenworth to be in readiness to march quickly to aid in the suppression of the [secessionist] rebellion."

Beyond Fort Kearny, the telegraph trains followed the Overland Stage route south of the Platte River, passing numerous ranches along the way. West of Plumb Creek (36 miles from the Fort), the pilgrim-laborers found the land becoming dry and teeming with wolves. Hot winds blew. From Cottonwood Springs to Fremont's Orchard the newcomers got acquainted with various varieties of American cacti, some of which were in bloom—and with prairie dogs and rattlesnakes. As the wagons continued westward, the Platte River Valley gradually narrowed until near Baker's Ranch it was only about a mile and a half wide.¹³ . . .

Charles Brown . . . expressed qualified admiration for the pilgrim-laborers: "These Mormon boys are strong, healthy, good-natured chaps and some of them possess good fine voices. . . . They have become pretty good ox drivers." . . .

On Aug. 10, from a vantage point north of the Platte River and one day after passing Scott's Bluffs, F. W. Blake (the Mormon immigrant who at Omaha had failed to get a job with Creighton) wrote in his journal: "We can see Telegraph poles recently erected on the other side of the river."

Three days later he wrote: "Got upon the California Road on the south side of the platte, [and passed] a station at which the Pony Express stays for to change or recruit & which has now (through the labour of Mormon Boys who are employed by the government) become a Telegraph Station." . . .

Each evening now a telegraph operator established a temporary station near the end of the line to receive and send messages. Pony Express riders carried dispatches westward from these transient telegraph offices and back again. By Sept. 11, the station was about 90 miles west of Fort Laramie. As the line reached within two miles of Fort Bridger, the builders ran out of wire. Construction was delayed briefly until Superintendent Creighton could secure wire from the crew that was building eastward from Salt Lake City.

At Fort Bridger, Creighton staged another powerful demonstration of the telegraph for Native Americans. He invited Chief Washakie to the fort and arranged for a Sioux chief to visit the Horse-

shoe telegraph station just west of Mud Springs. The two men already knew one another well. Via the "Lightning Road," they asked and answered a series of questions and then arranged to meet at an intermediate spot to compare notes. After this encounter, both Indians were convinced that the "talking wire" was the "voice of the Great Spirit."

Late in August, Superintendent Creighton again visited Salt Lake City, where he set up telegraph poles on the east side of Main Street. From Salt Lake City workers sought to maintain the Superintendent's projected schedule by extending the line eastward at the rate of 15 to 20 miles per day. Immigrant Thomas Cott Griggs, who crossed the Weber River on Sept. 9, saw "Telegraph company men raising the poles." On Sept. 11 the *Deseret News* reported that poles were "fast being put up, from this [city] eastward." Eleven days later the line builders were near the head of Echo Canyon, where that evening "several of the boys from the mountains [who were] engaged in the telegraph operation" visited the camp of the Sixtus E. Johnson immigrant company. The visitors, wrote George Teasdale, "were almost wearied (I should think) answering the numerous questions of friends the folks in the camp knew that had emigrated [earlier]." That night campfires burned late "as friends were meeting friends and they had 'lots to say.'"¹⁴ Men of the westward building Pacific Telegraph Company were not very far away and some of them helped finish the Salt Lake to Fort Bridger connection. Edwin Parker, one of the pilgrim-laborers, said that he followed the telegraph line from Fort Bridger to Salt Lake City, arriving on Oct. 10, 1861.¹⁵

In Utah, the pilgrim-laborers soon rejoined their friends and loved ones. Reunited, among others, were Charles and Jane Rogers, James and Harriet Ward, and John and Phoebe Vincent—John seeing his little son for the first time. John Hyman and Mary Ann Pitman were married on Nov. 10, 1861.¹⁶

On Oct. 14, Ed Creighton and others brought insulators and wires into Salt



Lake City and workers stretched the telegraph line into "the store lately occupied by Hooper, Eldridge and Company" at 83 South Main Street. With this, the Omaha to Salt Lake City telegraph was complete, "except for the small connection between Echo Canyon and Ft. Bridger." Finally, on Oct. 17, the two segments of the Pacific Telegraph Company wire united at Fort Bridger, Superintendent Edward Creighton personally splicing the two lines. The "Lightning Road" to Utah was complete. . . .

On Oct. [18] . . . Brigham Young dispatch[ed] his felicitations to Jephtha H. Wade, president of the

Pacific Telegraph Company in Cleveland, Ohio: "Permit me to congratulate you on the completion of the Overland Telegraph west to Salt Lake City, to commend the energy displayed by yourself and associates in the rapid and successful prosecution of a work so beneficial, and to express the wish that its use may ever tend to promote the true interests of our dwellers upon both the Atlantic and Pacific slopes of our continent. Utah has not seceded, but is firm for the constitution and laws of our country, and is warmly interested in such useful enterprises as the one so far completed."



According to the *Deseret News*, the “moving celebrities of Main Street then proceeded to send “congratulations over the wire to distant friends” and “the day throughout was ‘quite an occasion.’”¹⁷ From President Abraham Lincoln to the Honorable Frank Fuller, acting Governor of Utah came the following note on Oct. 20: “The completion of the telegraph to Great Salt Lake City, Utah, is auspicious of the stability and union of the republic.”¹⁸

On Oct. 24, the Overland Telegraph of California (a line just completed between Sacramento and Salt Lake City) linked up with the

Pacific Telegraph. Combined, the wires of these two companies completed the United States’ first transcontinental telegraph, a slender connection that helped bind the western states and territories to the then fragile American Union. Mormon pilgrim-laborers had played an important part in its construction—they had come upon the scene at a time when American labor was scarce because of the Civil War and they had partially filled the void. At the same time, they had made it possible for themselves and members of their families to reach their Zion. ▣

Excerpts from David Lyle Wood, “The Dearest Laborers’: Pilgrims on the Lightning Road to Zion,” Utah Historical Quarterly 75 (Winter 2007): 44–62.

David Lyle Wood, retired history professor, taught at the California State University in Northridge, California, for 32 years. He has since moved to Utah and is currently assigned as a service missionary at the Church History Library working on the Pioneer Overland Travel website.

1 Alvin E Harlow, *Old Wires and New Waves: The History of the Telegraph, Telephone, and Wireless* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), 306.

2 Quoted in Levi Edgar Young, *The Founding of Utah* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, c. 1924), 404.

3 U.S. Statutes at Large, Pacific Telegraph: Act, 36th Congress, 1st Session, chapter 137.

4 Charles H. Brown, *Telegraph Train of the Transcontinental Telegraph* (N.P., 1861), 1, 46, 51, 78.

5 “From One of the Missionaries,” *Deseret News*, Dec. 12, 1860.

6 Journal History, Dec. 20, 27, 1860.

7 Leonard J. Arrington, “Brigham Young,” *Improvement Era*, July 1951, 511.

9 Brown, 4, 9.

10 Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Mormon Biographical Sketches Collection, LDS Church History Library.

11 E. W. Blake, Diary, 1861 Apr.–Dec., LDS Church History Library; Mormon Immigration Index.

12 Brown, 5, 6, 9, 10, 51.

13 Brown, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41.

14 Sixtus E. Johnson Company Journal.

15 “History of the Western Union Telegraph Company,” *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 4:518; History of John Hymas and His Wives, 5.

16 “History of John Hymas and His Wives,” 5.

17, 18 “The Completion of the Telegraph,” *Deseret News* (1861), 11:189.

Telegraph photo (15) courtesy Utah State Historical Society. Left photo: courtesy Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

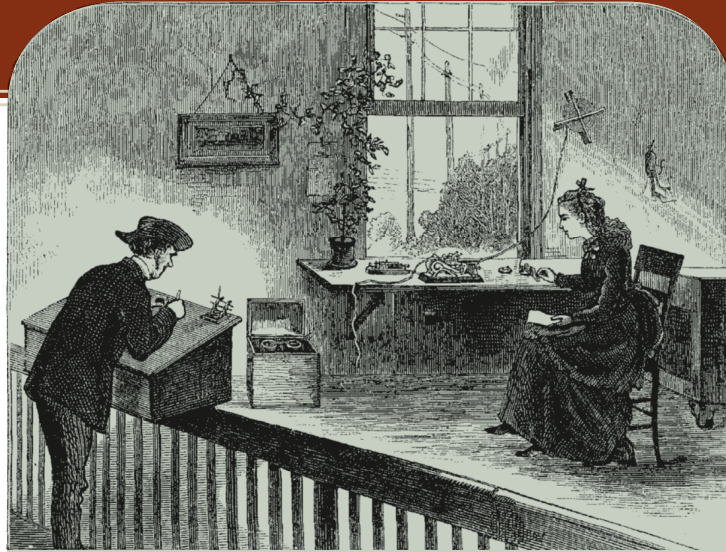


Women Telegraph Operators

ON THE WESTERN FRONTIER

BY THOMAS
C. JEPSEN

Women played an important, yet almost totally forgotten, role in the Westward expansion of the telegraph. Of the many images of frontier women that have appeared in popular literature, that of women telegraph operators on the Western frontier is least remembered. Yet, in 1886, a writer for *Electrical World* could state that "Far out on the western plains, wherever there is a road station, almost invariably the traveler sees a pretty lace or muslin curtain at the window, a bird cage hanging up aloft and some flowering plants on the narrow sill, or a vine trained up over the red door (these stations all along the line of the road are painted a dull, dark red) and other signs of the feminine presence, and if he looks out as the train stops he will be nearly sure to see a bright, neatly dressed, white-aproned young woman come to the door and stand gazing out at the train and watching the passengers with a half-pleased, half-sorry air. This is the local telegraph operator, who has taken up her lonely life out here on the alkali desert amid the sage brush, and whose only glimpse of the world she has left behind her is the brief acquaintance with the trains which pass and repass two or three times during the day. These are true type[s], all of them, of our brave American girl, whose courage is equal to the emergency."



Harper's Magazine, AUGUST, 1873

... While the typical woman operator in the East tended to work in a group environment, sometimes in a sexually segregated "ladies department," of a large telegraph company like Western Union or the Postal Telegraph

Company, her Western counterpart was often the sole operator of a rural telegraph office, located in the railroad station of a town or railroad crossing. Like all women on the frontier, her responsibilities were great and her resources limited.

In the West, the railroad operator often was the local Western Union operator as well; in this arrangement, the railroad paid the telegrapher's wages, while the Western Union provided the equipment and lines. Railroad operators, in addition to handling personal and business messages, handled train dispatch orders and were responsible for the scheduling of train arrivals and departures. ... The single-operator office typically consisted of a desk or bench in the railroad depot where all the telegraph equipment was located. A technically accurate illustration of such an office, with a female operator at the key, can be found in an article entitled "The Telegraph," which appeared in the August 1873 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. The equipment consisted of a cut-off switch, a telegraph key, a telegraph relay, and a telegraph "sounder" or "register." The sounder produced audible clicks that the operator had to decipher

by ear; the register marked or impressed dots and dashes onto a paper tape for later decoding. The wet battery, which supplied electrical power for the telegraph, was usually located in a wooden cabinet underneath the desk.

When the operator wished to transmit a message, she opened the switch lever located on the telegraph key, “breaking” the circuit. This placed the key between the battery and the telegraph wire, and allowed the key to make and break the circuit to produce the dots and dashes of Morse Code. Experienced operators could identify one another by their distinctive style of sending, or their “hand.” After transmitting a message, the operator would spindle the message form on a hook on the wall; at the end of the day, the forms would be filed for archival purposes.

In addition to sending and receiving messages, the operator at a small station was also responsible for battery maintenance. This involved periodic cleaning of the battery terminals and adding water and electrolyte when required. Telegraphic schools taught battery maintenance as part of their curriculum; instructions could also be found in the Western Union Rule Book, a compendium of regulations and practical advice for running a telegraph station. . . . Many telegraphers also served as ticket agents, or as express agents; some doubled as Wells Fargo agents. . . .

Western railroad operators, unlike their urban sisters, rarely had the luxury of regular working hours. In addition to the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. hours required to handle telegrams and commercial messages, railroad operators had to be present whenever trains passed by the station.

Anne Barnes Layton became the operator at Woods Cross, Utah, in 1879 at the age of 16. Her personal reminiscences, written later in life, provide a glimpse of her experience:

“When I was fifteen years old I studied telegraphy from my oldest sister, Mary Ann, who became Mrs. George Swan 12 December 1878. In four months I took the examination from

W. B. Dougall. I passed successfully and was assigned to the office at Woods Cross, Utah. I held this position for five years from October 1, 1879, until June 1, 1884. I resigned to marry the man of my choice, Seth Chauncey Jones of Salt Lake City. I never missed one roll call, which was at 8 a.m.

My salary was advanced three times. I clothed and boarded myself and gave my mother \$10.00 each month and helped clothe my youngest sister Sarah. I worked for the Western Union also the Utah Central Railroad.”

Anne was the sole operator at a sparsely equipped railroad station where the telegrapher’s equipment consisted of only her instruments, a flag and red lantern for signaling trains, and a supply of train orders and telegraph forms. She sometimes had to work as long as 18 hours a day when trains had been rerouted because of bad weather or accidents. Her friends would call at the station to see if she could go with them to parties and dances; however, as she later recalled, “I had to remain at my post until the last train cleared and they often were late, so I missed a lot of social life.”

. . . The connection of the Eastern and Western sections of the Transcontinental Telegraph was made in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1861; its successful completion stirred interest in the Mormon community in creating a telegraphic system to connect the widely separated Mormon settlements in Utah, Nevada, and Idaho. Construction of the Deseret Telegraph, as it was named, was completed in early 1866. Women were employed as operators from the beginning and formed a considerable proportion of the operators. Within the Mormon community, telegraphic work was regarded as a form of community service. A community would elect a young man or woman to go to Salt Lake City, receive telegraphic instruction, and return to the community to serve. Utah historian Kate Carter collected oral and written histories from surviving women operators in the late 1950s and 1960s for “The Story of Telegraphy,” a section of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers’s multivolume *Our Pioneer Heritage*. One of the earliest surviving



W. B. Dougall

photographs of women telegraphers and their equipment is one taken of Barbara Gowans and Emily Warburton upon their graduation in 1871 from the telegraphy school run by the Deseret Telegraph in Salt Lake City (*see below*). Barbara Gowans was born in 1855 in Liverpool, England; shortly thereafter her parents, Mormon converts, immigrated to the United States. They settled in Tooele, Utah, where Barbara's father became mayor. Barbara and a friend, Emily Warburton, became the first telegraph operators in Tooele after attending the course in Salt Lake City. Barbara recalled:

"When I was sixteen I went to Salt Lake City to learn telegraphy. Emily Warburton and I went together. We rented a room from a Mrs. Ure in the 15th Ward. We batched and our parents sent in provisions. We were three months in Salt Lake City being taught in President Young's office, whom we saw every day. We celebrated Pioneer Day in Salt Lake City in 1871 and participated in the telegraph float in the parade.

"In the fall of 1871 the Western Union opened an office in Tooele. Emily and I were the operators. I will never forget the first message I sent. Emily did not want to send it. I was very nervous, I tried but all that was received was the address and the signature."

Barbara Gowans married Benjamin L. Bowen in 1876 and had 11 children; she was succeeded as telegraph operator by her father after his return from missionary work in England.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of women telegraph operators in the 19th century was a surprisingly high degree of mobility. This was due in part to the fact that railroads often offered free passes to telegraphers, enabling them to move easily from place to place in search of work. Moving around was a way of advancing one's pay scale relatively quickly as well; staying in one place and waiting for a promotion often took years, while relocating to a distant city to fill a vacant position at a higher pay grade could bring a quick raise in salary.

Such positions were frequently advertised in the telegraphers' journals, and word of job openings spread quickly via the electric

"grapevine." As telegrapher Minerva C. Smith observed in 1907, "Often the only way the operators can secure an ultimate raise without incessant and usually fruitless demands is to travel from city to city and from one company to the other."

For women who regarded telegraphy as a career, moving around became part of a lifestyle that appears surprisingly contemporary to modern observers. . . . Women operators enjoyed unusual freedom in the 19th century.

Their skills, and the discretionary income that their trade provided, allowed them to change jobs and venues at will. Thus women operators were able to transcend the bounds of a patriarchal society, if they chose to do so. . . .

Both male and female telegraphers tended to enter the profession in late adolescence. An entry-level, or second-class, woman operator might make a starting salary of \$20 to \$25 a month; after a few years' experience, she might make as much as \$45 a month. Her male counterpart typically started at about the same rate of pay, but moved up more rapidly to a typical salary of around \$60 a month. The majority of women operators seem to have left the profession after a few years to marry. . . .



Barbara Gowans and Emily Warburton,
Deseret Telegraphy school graduation, 1871.

The percentage of telegraphers who were women was slightly lower in the West than in the East. The census of 1870, the first to differentiate occupations by sex, showed four percent of telegraphers to be women nationwide, while only about three percent were women in the Plains, prairie, and Far West regions. By 1900, when the census showed nearly 13 percent of the operators nationwide to be women, the West still trailed the East with only 11 percent women. However, reflecting the generalized Westward population shift, the actual number of women operators employed in the Western states grew from around 73 in 1870 to 2,456 in 1900. Like all figures dealing with the employment of women in the 19th century, the census figures almost certainly err on the low side. Some anecdotal accounts place the actual percentage of telegraph operators who were women to be as high as 20 or 25 percent. . . .

The number of telegraphers peaked in the 1920s and then began to decline, as the telegraph was replaced by the telephone for commercial use, and by automatic signaling equipment in its railroad applications.



Katherine Fenton Nutter

came west as a telegrapher and became Utah's cattle queen.

When Katherine died in Salt Lake City on July 17, 1965, at age 94, the *Salt Lake Tribune* called her

"perhaps the last of the West's cattle queens." Wife of Preston Nutter, she

was a telegrapher and manager of the Colo-

rado Springs Postal Telegraph Company's office during the Cripple Creek, Colorado, mining boom. After the death of her husband she became presi-

dent of the Preston Nutter Corporation, a large cattle ranching corporation.

Katherine evidently never forgot her telegraphy skills. On one occasion when she was ordering railroad cattle cars, a friend recalled, "she overheard the telegrapher rattling off an order for the cars in [Morse] code, stopped him and said, 'I ordered cattle cars, not sheep cars.' The surprised telegrapher realized she had read his message as fast as he sent it and had caught the error."

However, women and men continued to serve as Morse telegraph operators until the mid-1970s; the use of telegraphic signaling continued the longest in the rural regions of the West.

The telegraph operator fulfilled a special role in the development of the West, providing the means of communication that linked isolated communities to the rest of the world. The telegraph provided rural communities with news, commodity prices, and personal messages relating to births and deaths; it enabled the railroads to transport goods and passengers in a safe and orderly manner. Western newspaper editors relied heavily on telegraph operators to provide them with the latest news from the East and often spent many hours in the telegraph office awaiting reports. The women who served as telegraph operators were not only technical professionals, but also communicators, who provided their communities with much-anticipated information; the telegraph operator was often the best-

informed person in the community. Women on the Western frontier found innovative ways to fulfill their responsibilities, combining domestic work and telegraphy in ways that still seem original and innovative. ▼

Excerpts from Thomas C. Jepsen, "Women Telegraph Operators on the Western Frontier," Journal of the West (April 1996): 72-80.

Thomas C. Jepsen, author of numerous articles on the history of telecommunications technology, is a telecommunications systems architect in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Left photos courtesy Utah State Historical Society. Images courtesy National Archives: American Progress, by John Gast (4-5); telegraph workers (6-7, 10-11); telegraph map and engraving (8-9); Indian drawing (12); Deseret Telegraph station (22); St. George office (30).

Deseret State Telegraph

1866

On April 10, 1865, two days before President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, a special conference of The [LDS] Church . . . was held in Great Salt Lake City. Then and there was passed a motion approving the decision to erect a telegraph line from St. Charles, near chill-swept Bear Lake, to St. George in Utah's

cotton-growing Dixie. Branches were to be built to the principal Sanpete settlements, as well.

The citizens of each Mormon settlement were asked to raise the necessary money and construct and staff the line that would run through their particular valley. With

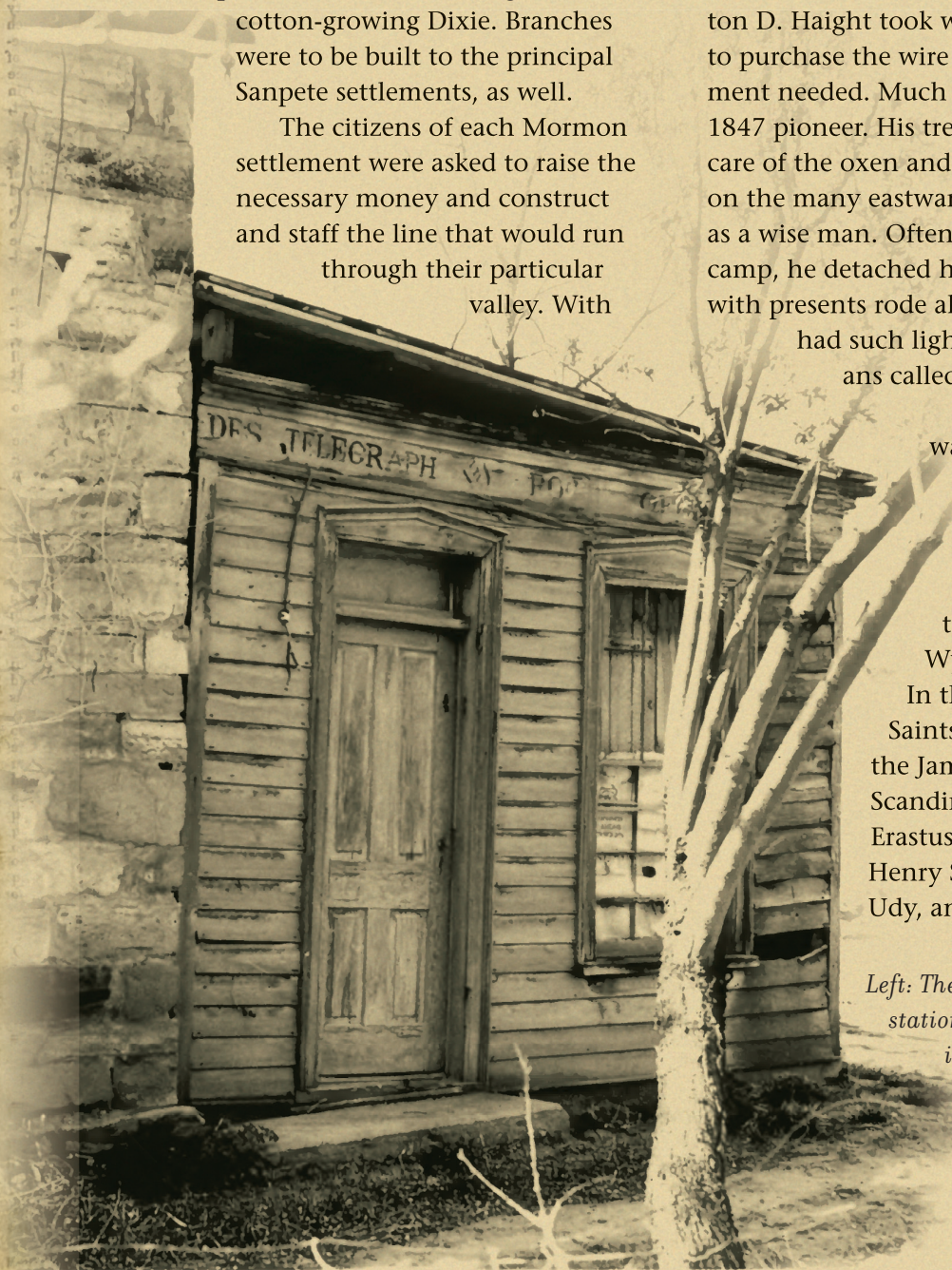
a total cost expected to be about \$100,000, every bishop and presiding elder, and others called to help with the project, were busy raising money during the winter of 1865–66. Each valley was required to furnish teams and teamsters to transport the wire and other equipment to Utah.

On one of his frequent trips to the East, Horton D. Haight took with him the gold with which to purchase the wire and other telegraphic equipment needed. Much could be said of this intrepid 1847 pioneer. His treatment of the Indians, and care of the oxen and horses that drew his wagons on the many eastward expeditions, marked him as a wise man. Often, before he reached an Indian camp, he detached himself from the company and with presents rode alone to the camp. Because he had such light hair and blue eyes, the Indians called him "Pi-up Anicum."

Captain Haight's train of 65 wagons arrived in the Valley on Oct. 15, 1866, with 84 tons of wire, insulators, batteries, and other equipment to be used in the construction of the lines. He had left Wyoming, Nebraska, in August.

In the train were 20 Latter-day Saints—the Robert Burton family, the James Harmon family, and one Scandinavian family. Lewis Oviatt, Erastus Rose, William Dobbs, James Henry Steed, David Sanders, William Udy, and John Jenkins were called to

Left: The Deseret Telegraph and Post Office station in Rockville, Utah, became an important link in the telegraph extension to the east—Pipe Springs and Kanab—where the Navajo Indian raiders were first intercepted when raiding the Mormon communities.



go to the Missouri to bring some of the Saints to Utah, but on arriving were assigned to Haight's company.

During the winter of 1865-66 men living in the different localities went into the canyons, cut the poles, and hauled them to points along the route of the proposed line while others were making the surveys. In the spring of 1866 those called to work on this project were released to tend their farms; but by the time the Haight train arrived with the necessary equipment, other volunteers were prepared to give of their time putting up the wires and connecting the telegraph line.

Quoted from the *Deseret News*: "The wire, insulators, etc., for the Deseret State Telegraph, were brought on this past season. During a portion of the summer and the early part of the fall, the people of the settlements north and south were active and energetic in putting up poles. The wire is now stretched from this city to Logan, Cache County, and it is expected that by the latter end of next week—say, five or six days—it will be in complete working order between this point and that settlement. Two companies of men are engaged in stretching wire south of this city. One company will work between here and Nephi, at which place they will branch off into Sanpete County, the poles having been set from Nephi through Mount Pleasant, Spring City, and Fort Ephraim to Manti. The other company will commence at Scipio, Round Valley, Millard County, and continue their labors south to St. George, Washington County. It is expected that by the last of the month, telegraphic communication will be opened between Great Salt Lake City and the principal settlements north and south.

DESERET TELEGRAPH

Lines to all Principal Points in Utah.

Elias Morris, Esq.

No.....

Charges.....

2:45 p.m. Dec. 19, 1892
 Bro. Morris -
 Just received cable from my son
 Liverpool which says
 "Nephie Morris arrived
 this morning feeling well"
 W. B. Sangall.

Telegraphs courtesy
 Utah State Historical Society.

"Offices will be established at the principal cities and settlements on the route of the line. Operators have been trained in the school established in this city by Mr. John C. Clowes of the Western Union Telegraph Company for instruction in the art of telegraphy. The pupils in that school have made very creditable progress, and most of the young men who attended it are now prepared, with very little assistance, to take charge of the various offices. The Western Union Telegraph Company, through Mr. Bassett, their superintendent in this city, has kindly placed the services of Mr. Clowes at the disposal of President B. Young, to fit up the offices and get the line in good working condition. This assistance, thus courteously rendered, will

enable young men who have been studying under Mr. Clowes to conduct the business in the several offices without further aid. . . .

"There is no other people to whom a telegraph line brings so many and so great blessings as to the Latter-day Saints. While the lines which almost span the world are laden with business communications, or transmit the record of strife, disunion and contention which reigns in many parts of the earth, not only will the Deseret State Telegraph be used for ordinary business matters and the transmission of news, but it is a means by which counsel, advice and instruction can be imparted to the people of the various settlements of the Territory,

The Mormon Telegraph Line

Communication across the Utah Territory

by **David McNeill**

In the 1860s, the Mormon church became a utility builder by constructing across the Utah desert a telegraph line connecting their isolated settlements. . . .

Timber was scarce in the mountains of Utah; more than a decade of Mormon settlement had denuded the easily accessible woods. Nor was labor available without Mormon assistance. Mormon historian Leonard Arrington argues that cooperation from Utah officials, which meant the Church, was essential if the project were to succeed. Western Union quickly struck a deal with Brigham Young, the LDS prophet. In exchange for \$11,000 in gold, Brigham Young agreed to provide labor and materials for the section of telegraph line running across Utah.

Brigham Young & Technology

The experience of building a telegraph line quickly proved valuable. Brigham Young immediately began making plans to build what was surely the first Church-owned public utility. Brigham Young's personality directly influenced the course of Utah history. In this case, the important part of his personality was his love for technology. A look at his 1869 letterbook at Utah State University reveals his interest in a number of items, some useful, some not. He corresponded with the makers of underwater pumps, cracker-making machines, gargling oil and something called a "lamb's knitting machine." In an Oct. 27, 1868, letter to the inventors of a "Steam Water Lifter," Young wrote, "I am deeply interested in every improvement made in labor saving machinery." Many religious leaders shun new technology through innate conservatism, but Brigham Young was as much a pragmatic

pioneer leader as he was a prophet and was ready to embrace the new.

Young recognized that the time for a telegraph in Utah had arrived. In a circular published by the *Deseret News* in 1864, Young reminded his bishops and presiding elders throughout the Utah Territory of the importance of a telegraph system. In the missive, Young announced that "the proper time has arrived for us to take the necessary steps to build the telegraph line to run north and south through the territory." In 1866, the Saints began running telegraph wire after Brigham Young purchased the necessary equipment.

Pictured right: First telegraphic key used by Deseret Telegraph Co. Operated from Dec. 1, 1861, to Aug. 3, 1885, by William B. Dougall and others. Carried first telegraph message across nation in 1862. On display at International Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum.





Photo courtesy Utah State Historical Society.

Funding & Building the Mormon Telegraph

In the decentralized tradition of early Mormonism, each settlement was responsible for the financing of its own lines. As was the custom in Utah, calling for tithes became the means to accomplish the task. . . . When the call went out to the Saints to help build the telegraph, contributions came in all forms. In St. George, Church clerk James G. Bleak recorded that tithing for the telegraph totaled \$1,573.33, of which \$890 was in pledges of labor. Bleak called the remaining \$683.33

that were actually promises of supplies, particularly poles.

Armed with commitments of labor and supplies, the Saints began work, cutting logs for the telegraph poles during the winter and hauling them into place in the spring. Arrington records that by December 1867, 500 miles of lines fused Utah's far-flung hamlets. From the main office at Salt Lake City, which was connected to the larger national Western Union system, lines ran north to Logan and Ogden and south to St. George.

As was every other large operation in early Utah, the construction of the line was financed by the Church. The Deseret Telegraph

from those to whom the people look for counsel and instruction, and that, almost instantaneously. Up till now the urgent necessity for counsel, which circumstances have created, has been hampered by the lack of greater facilities of communication, and hence the construction of the line became imperative, as the interest of the work of the Lord increased in magnitude, and the welfare of the people demanded more unremitting and greater attention. . . .

"A new era has been inaugurated for the people of the Territory this evening, the importance of which it is difficult, if not impossible, fully to estimate. The Deseret State Telegraph has been opened, and the following dispatches,

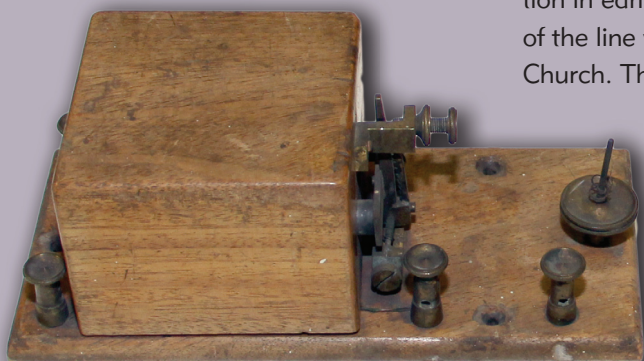
"cash," but indicated that most of

Company, which was the corporation that supported the telegraph, was only incorporated on Jan. 18, 1867, well after construction began. All of the initial shareholders were powerful figures in the Church. Brigham Young was the largest shareholder. The telegraph was an arm of the LDS Church.

The line operated for 33 years and never declared dividends. When the company operated in the red, as it usually did, debt was paid from tithe money. In exchange, the Deseret Telegraph carried Church business free of charge. The company also gave preferred rates to residents of Utah. Compared to its national peer, Western Union, Deseret Telegraph was considerably friendlier to the community of which it was part. ▣

Excerpts from www.suite101.com/content/the-mormon-telegraph-line-a119673.

David McNeill is a freelance writer in Fort Collins, Colorado.



dedicatory and congratulatory, have been passed along the wire between this city and Ogden. The first dispatch was forwarded by Mr. John C. Clowes, at 5 p.m., and the reply was returned by Mr. Joseph A. West, a youth of 14 years of age.

“Salt Lake City, Dec. 1, 1866

“To President Lorin Farr and Bishop Chauncey W. West and the Saints in the northern country, who gave freely when called upon.

“In my heart I dedicate the Line which is now completed and being completed, to the Lord God of Israel, whom we serve, and for the building up of His kingdom; praying that this and all other improvements may contribute to our benefit and the glory of our God, until we can waft ourselves by the power of the Almighty from world to world to our Fullest satisfaction.

—Brigham Young”

“President Brigham Young:

“From our hearts we say ‘Amen’ to the dedication which you have just uttered, and we congratulate you, as the great mover of this enterprise, on its successful accomplishments thus far, considering it is one of the great helps in the building up of the kingdom of God. We trust that not only will the Saints who have contributed to this great work continue their efforts, but that others will also assist in developing other improvements for the benefit of God’s work.

—Lorin Farr

—Chauncey W. West”

A telegraph school was set up with John Calhoon Clowes as teacher in the Brigham Young Schoolhouse. He was an experienced telegrapher. Mr. Clowes was born Dec. 5, 1835, in Maryland to Ezekiel W. and Gertrude M. Anderson Clowes. He came to Utah and was baptized a member of the Latter-day Saint Church Nov. 24, 1864. On Mar. 10, 1866, he was married to Annie Smith in the Endowment House. 📖

Excerpts from Our Pioneer Heritage (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1967), 10:10–12.

CHRONOLO



1603 – Discovery of phenomena of attraction and repulsion announced by Dr. William Gilbert, court physician of Queen Elizabeth’s court at London.

1752 – Experiment by Benjamin Franklin with kite during thunderstorm that brought flash of lightning over wet kite string. Result — Lightning Rod.

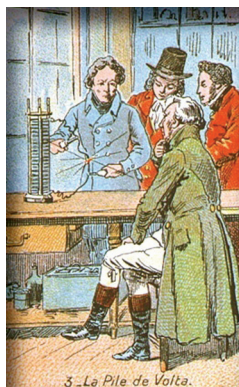


1791 – Samuel Finley Breese Morse, born 27 April at Breeds Hill, Charleston, Mass., about a mile



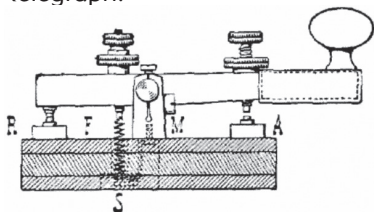
from birthplace of Benjamin Franklin and a little over a year after the latter’s death.

1794 – Semaphoric or visual communication established by moving wooden arms. Idea of Chappe brothers in France.



1800 – Count Alessandro Volta invented voltaic pile, demonstrating that electricity could be induced by contact.

1832 – Morse announced his invention of the electric telegraph.



1837 – First telegraph instrument completed. Morse filed a caveat at Patent Office, Washington, 6 Oct.

1845 – 1 April first telegraph wire opened for business over wire of Magnetic Telegraph Company, Washington–Baltimore.



1851 – New York and Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Company incorporated in New York. (Afterward became Western Union.)

1853 – California State Telegraph Company incorporated to build line between San Francisco and Marysville, via San Jose. Wires completed 28 Oct.



1856 – The Western Union Telegraph Company incorporated, combining many small organizations, which eliminated duplication, increased speed, making service more reliable in every way.

1861 – Overland telegraph line commenced to link coast to coast. Construction started from Omaha, Nebraska, 4 July. Joined at Salt Lake City, Utah, 22 Oct. First message 24 Oct. Acknowledged one of

the most wonderful pieces of work in the world's history.



1861 – Last run of Pony Express rider, 21 Nov.

1865 – Motion passed approving the erection of a telegraph line from Bear Lake in the north to St. George, Utah, 10 April.

1866 – Telegraph school set up in Brigham Young Schoolhouse with John Calhoun Clowes as teacher.

1867 – By January, five hundred miles of wire had been strung extending from Logan, Utah, on the north to St. George, Utah, on the south.

1867 – Deseret Telegraph Company incorporated, 18 Jan. with Brigham Young as president.

Cove Fort telegraph office



The Story of Telegraphy, Our Pioneer Heritage, *Daughters of Utah Pioneers* (1961) 4:509 – 72.

**TO THE PRESIDING ELDERS AND SAINTS OF
THE PLACES WHERE THERE ARE OR WHERE THEY WISH
TO HAVE TELEGRAPH STATIONS AND OPERATORS**

Dear Brethren:

The Telegraph line has not been established for the purpose of speculation, but to meet the wants of the people. On reflection, it must occur to you, that, in order to make it a success, the people must assist in bearing the financial burdens of the line. To expect us to meet the continual demands of all the operators and furnish all the materials to keep the line running, would be asking entirely too much. The line may not support itself for some time to come. Every Saint will readily admit, that, for the people, remote and near by, to be in immediate communication with the Presidency of the Church, is a blessing and privilege beyond the consideration of dollars and cents. Suppose we were to assume the rents of all the offices, the support and pay of the operators, and to furnish the materials needed in every office; the burden would be too heavy; and it does seem that every public-spirited man will view the matter in the same light.

After a while, when the line pays, the liabilities will be assumed by the President and Directors; but until then, we should all bear a part, and be thankful for being in so close communication with the sources of important counsel and information; let the emergency be great or small. Such place as Cove Creek, where there is no settlement, we will have to support the station, and build, for the safety of the operator, a stone Fort and also place therein other persons to sustain the place against Indian attacks, and that the line may be preserved intact. Such small places as Kanara should be helped in sustaining the operator, by Harmony and places immediately benefitted by the close proximity of the office. It is desirable that the operators, one and all, should regard themselves as missionaries,—on important missions—which, if they honorably fill, will reflect to their present and future credit, as other missions do. The people, by a little reflection, will no doubt comprehend the situation and readily help by sustaining the operators until such time as the line will sustain itself. Should there be a settlement where the people are unwilling to support the operator, you will please let us know, and we will remove the office to a place where it will be appreciated.

Respectfully, your Brother in the Gospel,

Brigham Young

Monument To Recall Historic Linkup

SUP To Hold Telegraph Marker Rites

On Oct. 18, 1861, workers strung the last set of wires to a utility pole on Salt Lake City's East Temple (Main) Street. The North American Continent had been spanned by telegraph wire.

Tuesday, in commemoration of that history-making event, the Sons of Utah Pioneers Memorial Foundation will erect a granite monument on the site where that historic utility pole stood at 63 S. Main St.

The ceremony will recall the first message sent on the newly completed wire. It was received in Cleveland, Ohio, Oct. 18, 1861, by an official of the Pacific Overland Telegraph Co.

Gives Congratulations

The message, from Brigham Young, president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, expressed congratulations to the company and assured Utah's loyalty to the Union.

On the following day, President Abraham Lincoln sent this message: "The completion of the telegraph to Great Salt Lake City is auspicious of the stability and union of the republic. The government reciprocates your congratulations."

Lincoln's wire was in answer to one sent by Frank Fuller, at that time acting territorial governor in Utah.

Set In Bronze

Along with a message sent by the telegraph company's president, J. H. Wade, these four early messages have been set in bronze and will be one of two plaques on the front of the new monument.

Dedication ceremonies for the monument will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Lafayette Ballroom of Hotel Utah, with the unveiling program at the monument site set at 8:30 p.m.

The program, as outlined by Nicholas G. Morgan Sr., president of the SUP Memorial Foundation, will include remarks by Gov. J. Bracken Lee and Dr. Adam S. Bennion, civic leader and member of the Council of the Twelve of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Other Speakers

William H. Watts, New York City, national member of com-

munity relations for Western Union Telegraph Co., will deliver an address. The invocation will be by Mayor Earl J. Glade, and music will be furnished by Lt. Col. Arthur Kent, former Metropolitan Opera star. Community singing will be led by Prof. Leroy J. Robertson of University of Utah.

Moving to the monument site for the unveiling ceremonies, the assemblage will hear brief remarks by City Commissioner L. C. Romney and P. L. Lane, Salt Lake City superintendent for Western Union. Music will be furnished by selected members of the University of Utah bands and of the local mu-

sicians' union. Mrs. Kate B. Carter, president of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, will unveil the monument.

Adorn Monument

Two bronze plaques will adorn the monument. One is a representation of the area adjacent to the monument site as it appeared in 1861. On the other will be copies of the first telegrams sent and received in Salt Lake City—by Brigham Young, Abraham Lincoln, J. H. Wade, president of Pacific Telegraph Co., and Frank Fuller, acting territorial governor of Utah.

Both the program at Hotel Utah and at the monument site are open to the public.



MONUMENT READIED—Nicholas G. Morgan Sr., displays plaque to be placed on monument commemorating connection of trans-continental telegraph wires in Salt Lake City 94 years ago.

Deseret News, Oct. 17, 1955

Brigham Young's Winter Home and Office

In 1873 Brigham Young realized . . . the years of heavy physical toil and the stress of even heavier mental burdens began catching up with him. He knew that for his own sake and for the sake of his people, he must begin taking care of himself. The one thing he dreaded most of all was the cold winters. He was New England born and bred and had been a resident of Salt Lake City for most of his mature life, which should have inured him to the cold, but it hadn't. . . .

He already owned a home in St. George at 111 West St. George Boulevard . . . inhabited by one of [his] older wives, Aunt Lucy B. But Brigham knew that he would not find contentment in his winter sojourn if he could not be accompanied by his young wife, Amelia Fulsom. He had promised Amelia when she consented to marry him that he would never ask her to live in the same house as any of his other wives. . . . Brigham settled on a solution acceptable to all [by building] Amelia

a new home which was close enough to Lucy B. that he could conveniently drop in on her every day. He purchased a lot at 155 West 200 North and called in his architect, Miles Romney, to build a comfortable house worthy of Amelia. Miles was busy with public works, the Temple, the Tabernacle, and the County Courthouse, but he designed the house and oversaw the construction of the lower floor. He turned the rest of the work over to his son, Miles P., who had served as an apprentice to his father on the other buildings. The original portion of the home was begun in 1869 and completed in 1871. The front addition was completed in 1873.

The house, at 67 West 200 North, had a two-room basement or cellar, as they called it then, built of red sandstone. . . . Outside the house was of the same type of architecture popular with the Mormons in the Nauvoo period. The roof was gabled and covered with wood shingles and the cornices were bracketed.



East of the home was a small, one-room structure, 18'5" by 22'5". Here, Brother Brigham had his office and his private telegraph equipment. Here Dixie's early "snowbird" was able to supervise the building of the St. George Temple.¹

This first telegraph office established in St. George in 1867 by President Brigham Young was a branch of the Deseret Telegraph Company. It was later moved to the old Co-op store building just across the street and then moved to a building erected for the purpose across the street north of the Tabernacle. At one time it had been located in a room of the



St. George telegraph photos courtesy Robert Thornley.

County Court House. Operators included Robert Charles Lund, Elizabeth Bleak (wife of recorder James Bleak),² Joseph C. Bentley, Walter Keate, and Edward H. Snow.³ ❏

1 See <http://wchsutah.org/homes/brigham-young-home.htm>.

2 <http://www.stgeorgetemplevisitorscenter.info/by/byoffice.html>

3 Nora Lund, "The Story of Telegraphy Washington County, A Tribute, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, vol. 4.



Robert Charles Lund

was born at the end of May 1847 at New Diggins, Warren Co., Wisconsin, to Wilson and Eliza Ann Brace Lund.

After the family joined the Church and moved to Utah, they first settled in Salt Lake City. Robert moved to St. George in 1860. Serving as the official telegrapher for Brigham Young and the Church, he became the first telegraph operator for the Deseret Telegraph Company, at St. George, Utah, and Pioche, Nevada. He worked as the Wells Fargo express agent at St. George and Silver Reef, Utah; was a clerk and part owner of

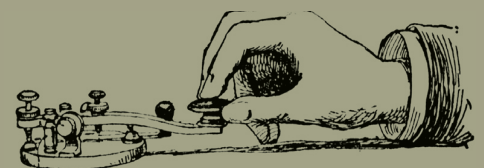
a mining and mercantile business; was chairman of the board of county commissioners for Washington County; and was a member of the territorial legislature.

Robert married Mary Ann Romney in 1870 at Salt Lake City. Mary was born in 1848 at St. Louis, Jefferson Co., Missouri, to Miles Romney and Elizabeth Gashell. Mary's father, Miles Romney, was the architect for the St. George Tabernacle as well as, among other buildings, Brigham Young's St. George home that housed the telegraph office.

A close friend of Robert said of him, "Robert C. Lund was a

telegraph operator, one of the best. He kept the President informed at St. George and then would accompany him on the way coming north. . . . Bob would make the best copy. I never admitted it to him, but I can see the nice round lettered copy of his right now, and if he were here I would say to him, 'Bob, you take the prize.'" ❏

"*The Story of Telegraphy Juab County, A Tribute*," *Our Pioneer Heritage*, vol. 4.



NATIONAL SUP SYMPOSIUM AND BANQUET Saturday, May 7, 2011, 1:30 – 8:00 p.m.

National SUP Headquarters
(1:30 – 5:00 p.m.)

Speakers: John M. Beck,
Dr. Matt J. Grow, Paul T. Smith

Musical Presentations

Banquet: at Canyon Rim Stake Center
3051 S 2900 E (6:00 – 8:00 p.m.)

Keynote Speaker: Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Of the Quorum of the Twelve
(Mothers' Day special music)

Early Registration: \$22 /person
If paying by cash or check: \$20 /person

After April 15: \$27/person
If paying by cash or check: \$25 /person

For reservations please call SUP at 801-484-7277

2011 SUP NATIONAL CONVENTION Salt Lake City, August 25–27, 2011



Above, Fielding Garr Ranch; upper right, buffalo from Antelope Island; below, Bingham Canyon copper mine.

In 1847 President Brigham Young asked the Lord to "give the Saints ten years, unmolested, to sink our roots so deeply into this valley, that we would never again be driven from our homes." In 1857, almost ten years to the day, Johnston's Army arrived and brought the outside world. Please join us in Salt Lake City for a journey back in time. Come learn of the challenges, tears, divisions, and triumphs of settling a new land. This will be an experience you will not soon forget. Register by July 15, 2011, for the early registration rates. We hope to see you all here!

Sponsored by the Holladay Chapter



Photos from www.Flickr.com: copper mine © Earthworks Action; buffalo by ATISS47. Garr Ranch by hikers6, www.outdoors.webshots.com

Sons of Utah Pioneers

Pony Express MUSEUM *AND* SUP LIBRARY

DONATE

for

Building Remodel

Display Units

and

Updating Library

Facilities

The existing library staff and present facilities will be able to accommodate the addition of the museum with little additional cost.





**INSTRUCTIONS FOR MANAGERS
AND OPERATORS OF THE
DESERT TELEGRAPH OFFICES**

1. *Never send a dispatch unless you have news of general interest and importance, i.e. we do not want news of general interest only to your own locality.*
2. *All dispatches should be carefully condensed, telegraph only the actual facts and their causes, leave out all superfluous words and unnecessary details.*
3. *If fire occurs, send name of losers, their losses, the insurance, . . . also cause of fire.*
4. *Report fatal accidents, murders, shooting affrays and disasters, or the death of any distinguished person residing in your locality.*
5. *If any extraordinary event or disaster occurs, telegraph the fullest particulars.*
6. *In all cases of disaster to life, the names of the killed and wounded are of the first importance.*
7. *Get your dispatches off at the earliest possible moment after the occurrence of any item of interest. Stale news is worthless; use every exertion to obtain full particulars and forward them directly, but always give commercial business first use of the wires.*
8. *Confine yourself strictly to facts. We do not want opinions.*
9. *Forward the dispatches immediately, addressed to Salt Lake Office, which is open till 9:30 P.M.; should you anticipate something of importance later than that hour, notify the office in time to have it kept open.*

The following are betimes fruitful sources of interest to the general public; new mines, rich discoveries, reducing works, railroads, public structures, public celebrations and meetings, court proceedings, arrests, Indians, storms, cloud-bursts, etc., ravages by insects, crops, epidemics.

SALT LAKE CITY, NOV. 19, 1874.

A. M. MUSSER, SUPT.